

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES BY DEPUTY
P.V.F. LE CLAIRE OF ST. HELIER**

ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON TUESDAY 3rd FEBRUARY 2009

Question

What is the Travel Policy of the Health and Social Services Department for patients and relatives requiring off-Island treatment and are the Income Tax Department and Social Security involved and if so, in what way?

Answer

The Health and Social Services Department has a comprehensive Travel Policy which has been in effect in different guises since 1998, but which has been adapted during the interim period in the light of circumstances. The aim of the policy is to provide financial assistance to certain categories of patients who will require travel to the mainland to receive specialist health care services. The current version of this policy was approved in February 2008.

My Department will meet the travel costs and make financial assistance available to a patient or client provided:

- That the patient or client income is below defined financial thresholds (depending on their marital status and family circumstances)
- That the patient or client is a Jersey resident (or covered by a reciprocal health agreement)
- That the patient or client has been referred to the UK Health Services provider by a consultant employed by the Health and Social Services Department.

My Department will meet the travel costs and make financial assistance available to a patient or client's relatives:

- When the patient or client is a child under the age of 18 years.
- When the patient or client is over the age of 75 years.
- When the patient or client is registered as disabled.
- When the patient or client is unable to travel unescorted due to his/her clinical condition (as defined by the referring consultant).

My Department will not reimburse costs associated with:

- Relatives' accommodation
- Food and meals
- Childcare
- Private arrangements
- Care of animals
- Maintenance of property and vehicles
- Loss of earnings

Involvement of Income Tax and Social Security

The main purpose of the Travel Policy is to define a patient or client's eligibility for financial assistance. Whilst the policy always had an element of 'means testing' within it, it was never possible for my Department to verify the statements and declarations made by prospective patients about their income levels. I am very sorry to say that there have been a number of attempts made over the years by prospective patients and clients to be less than truthful about their financial status and this obviously means that this is an abuse of tax payer's money (tax

payer's money that funds my Department, that is). I have a duty to protect the tax payer's interests, as well as a duty to ensure appropriate health care.

In 2007, the onus was changed in that it became the duty of the patient or client to demonstrate that they were eligible for financial assistance – rather than my staff having to attempt to verify a patient or client's income levels in the face of hostility from that individual.

Involvement of Income Tax:

The Travel Policy does not require the specific involvement of the Income Tax team, but since 2007 it has been recognised that if the patient or client provides a copy of their agreed tax return this can be used as evidence of their income levels (from all sources) and support their claim for travel assistance.

(It is important to note is that whilst individuals are encouraged to keep copies of their original tax returns, an individual already has the right to request a copy for any reason).

Involvement of Social Security:

The Travel Policy does not require the specific involvement of the Social Security Department - but a patient or client can provide their Income Support notification as evidence to support their claim for travel assistance, this is the same notification that they would have received informing them of their income support status.

The Travel Policy is a fair and reasonable policy which directs financial assistance to those Islanders who demonstrably require it. I am saddened that some Islanders have sought to mask and hide their true financial status in order that they can exploit the taxpayer's generosity by seeking to obtain free travel to the mainland. I am equally saddened that some patients have sought to vent their dissatisfaction with this policy on junior staff who work in the Travel Office (who incidentally, are all female). I do not take kindly to such belligerent behaviour and my Department is currently considering what action to take against such behaviour on the part of a few members of our community.